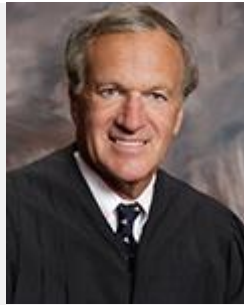


Conservative Jim Johnson will retire from Washington Supreme Court

Posted on March 17, 2014 | By Joel Connelly
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State Supreme Court Justice Jim Johnson, the high court's lone outspoken conservative, announced Monday that he will retire from the court on April 30.

Johnson has been absent, due to illness, for much of the court's current term. Once a top aide to then-Attorney General Slade Gorton, he is serving his second term on the high court and would have been up for reelection in 2016.



Justice Johnson

"While I have been grateful for this opportunity, recent health concerns have led me to decide that this was the right time to retire from the bench and spend time with my family and to travel," Johnson said in a statement.

Gov. Jay Inslee will appoint a successor who will have to stand for reelection this fall.

Johnson was the attorney general's point man on Indian treaty litigation in the 1970's, at a time when Gorton challenged rulings by U.S. District George Boldt that said treaty Indians had a right to half of the commercial salmon catch of the Puget Sound basin.

As a private attorney, he later represented owners of waterfront property who challenges Native Americans' rights to harvest shellfish on their tidal lands. Johnson did legal work for the conservative Evergreen Freedom Foundation and Permanent Offense, the political committee of relentless initiative sponsor Tim Eyman. He was strongly supported for the court by the Building Industry Association of Washington.

Johnson was a consistent defender of property rights and individual rights on the Supreme Court bench. He was the lone dissenter in a recent court ruling, requiring the Legislature to report by April on progress toward reaching full funding of state schools, writing:

"This court's expanding control of the Legislature's funding of education continues to be a violation of the state's constitution."

Although his views have been controversial, Johnson has long been affable and approachable, a lover of good debate. After a University of Washington Law School debate, during his first Supreme Court campaign, Johnson turned a chair around and engaged in a prolonged, good-natured argument with law students.

Not to confuse names, Justice Charles Johnson continues to serve on the Supreme Court.